

Message Text

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17

ACTION EA-09

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NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SAJ-01

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P 050551Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8689

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY MANILA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 5673

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: AS, US, PT, ID, IN

SUBJ: AUSTRALIAN PRESS FLAPS OVER US POLICY TOWARDS INDONESIA

1. SUMMARY: HEADLINE STORIES IN THE AUGUST 3 AND 4 EDITIONS OF 'THE MELBOURNE AGE' ALLEGED THAT THE UNITED STATES WARNED AUSTRALIA NOT TO ALLOW FURTHER DETERIORATION OF RELATIONS WITH INDONESIA OVER TIMOR. THE AUGUST 4 STORY ALSO ALLEGED THAT THIS EMBASSY INITIALLY WARNED THE FRASER GOVERNMENT ABOUT ITS STANCE ON TIMOR AND THAT THE WARNING WAS REPEATED BY HIGH RANKING MEMBERS OF THE FORD ADMINISTRATION AND THE PENTAGON DURING THE PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON. THE STORIES WERE FILED BY MICHAEL RICHARDSON, AND 'AGE' REPORTER, FROM SINGAPORE. RICHARDSON CITES QTE U.S. OFFICIALS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA END QTE AS THE SOURCE OF HIS STORIES. DFA ISSUED A STATEMENT ON AUGUST 4 DENYING THE STORIES, BUT PREDICTABLY THE CANBERRA PRESS CORPS QUESTIONED DEPUTY SECRETARY ROBINSON CLOSELY ON U.S. POLICY TOWARDS INDONESIA
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DURING HIS AUGUST 4 APPEARANCE AT THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB.

END SUMMARY.

2. RICHARDSON'S STORIES ARE TROUBLESOME HERE BECAUSE HE CITES U.S. OFFICIALS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AS HIS SOURCE. BRIEFLY PUT, RICHARDSON ASSERTS THAT THE UNITED STATES WARNED AUSTRALIA NOT TO ALLOW FURTHER DETERIORATION OF RELATIONS WITH INDONESIA OVER TIMOR ON THE GROUNDS THAT IF AUSTRALIAN RELATIONS WITH INDONESIA WORSENE IT COULD HINDER U.S. STRATEGY FOR BALANCING SOVIET MILITARY MOVES IN THE AREA. U.S. OFFICIALS ARE ALLEGED TO HAVE TOLD RICHARDSON THAT CONTROL OF EAST TIMOR BY A QTE FRIENDLY ANTI-COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT WOULD BE A MATTER OF DIRECT STRATEGIC INTEREST TO THE UNITED STATES BECAUSE THE FASTEST WAY FOR AMERICAN NUCLEAR ARMED SUBMARINES TO PASS SUBMERGED BETWEEN THE PACIFIC AND INDIAN OCEANS IS THROUGH THE LITTLE-KNOWN DEEP WATER STRAITS OF OMBAI-WITAR, NORTH OF TIMOR ISLAND.

3. THE STORY GOES ON TO STATE THAT THE U.S. CONSIDERS THAT INDONESIAN GOOD WILL IS IMPORTANT FOR SECURING U.S. AND ALLIED INTERESTS IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT AS WELL AS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA.

4. COMMENT: RICHARDSON IS AN AUSTRALIAN JOURNALIST WHO WAS THROWN OUT OF INDONESIA SOME TIME AGO. HE IS, HOWEVER, HIGHLY RESPECTED IN AUSTRALIA AS A CAREFUL AND CAUTIOUS REPORTER. HIS REPORTS CARRY GREAT WEIGHT HERE AND HIS NEWSPAPER, 'THE MELBOURNE AGE', IS CONSIDERED TO BE THE BEST IN AUSTRALIA. AN EDITORIAL IN THE AUGUST 5 EDITION OF THE 'AGE' GENERALLY SUPPORTS THE CONTENTIONS WHICH HE MADE AND DEPLORES THE FACT THAT BIG POWER CONSIDERATIONS RESULTED IN THE EFFECTIVE DENIAL OF BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS FOR 600,000 EAST TIMORESE. (FULL TEXT OF EDITORIAL FOLLOWS BY SEPTTEL). FOR WHAT IT IS WORTH, THE EMBASSY HAS NEVER MADE ANY REPRESENTATIONS TO THE GOA CONCERNING ITS PUBLIC POSITION ON TIMOR NOR TO OUR KNOWLEDGE HAVE ANY SUCH REPRESENTATIONS BEEN MADE IN WASHINGTON. WE WOULD WELCOME ANY COMMENTS WHICH EMBASSY SINGAPORE MAY HAVE ON THE QTE U.S. OFFICIALS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA END QTE WHO ARE ALLEGED TO HAVE CONFIRMED THESE TROUBLESOME REPORTS. END COMMENT.
HARGROVE

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